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CHILDREN AND CONFLICT: OPPORTUNITY FOR LEARNING?

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Each and every day we send messages to children about how we view them as learners, thinkers, and problem-solvers, whether or not we see them as capable individuals, and whether or not we respect their right to have some control over their world. If I had to pinpoint one aspect of our early childhood program that stands out as most essential, I believe it would be the conscious attention we try to focus on the direct and indirect messages we communicate to children through our words and actions. Our goal is to ensure that children who walk through our doors receive a powerful message that they are respected as individuals and as capable learners, thinkers, and problem-solvers. We spend time as a staff thinking about how we move children toward self-control, how to use praise and encouragement appropriately, how to provide positive, meaningful, successful experiences for every child. In particular, we have put a great deal of thought into how we help children gain the skills necessary to resolve conflicts appropriately.

As we begin to think about this issue, we discovered that our tendency was to solve problems for children rather than guiding them through a problem-solving process. On the surface, it seemed that we were doing what we had been trained to do. Children were bringing their problems to us and we were providing them with the answers they were seeking. We started with analyzing our responses to children's conflicts to determine the "real message" being sent to children. One common response was to remove the object of dispute until the children were ready to "share" it. We found that we were not giving children the opportunity to learn how to share, and we were sending the message, "You are not capable of sharing, therefore you don't get to play." Another common response was to have an adult intervene and give each child a turn with the disputed object for five minutes. In these scenarios, the adult solved the problem for

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DIRECTOR'S CORNER

The Department is currently in the process of revising the Administrative Rules for Child Care Centers. An ad hoc committee made up of 14 representatives from state agencies, providers, parents and child care advocates will make recommendations to the Department regarding proposed changes. The committee hopes to wrap up its work by June. We will take these recommendations into consideration when drafting a revised set of rules. Once this draft is completed, several public hearings will be scheduled around the state for input from the child care community. I am hopeful this can be arranged some time in the fall of this year.

Notices will go out to all providers and the child care advocacy organizations which will include the location, time and dates of each hearing. Subsequent to the hearings, the rules may once again be revised and finalized for submission to the Legislature's Joint Committee on Administrative Rules. This committee is made up of both House and Senate legislators who have final authority to approval the rules. They will also hold hearings on the rules prior to their final action. While the process is lengthy and complicated, it does provide for the state to establish rules that best meet the overall needs of children and families.

Michigan's rules are some of the best in the country and we can improve upon them using our experience as a child care industry. I encourage all of you to express your opinions and participate as much as you can. This is intended to be an open process and I hope you take advantage of it.

As of this writing, the ad hoc committee meetings are scheduled for:

February 14, 1994	May 20, 1994
March 14, 1994	June 17, 1994
April 11, 1994	Summer dates to be announced

They are subject to the open meetings act and any one can observe these proceedings. There will be a brief period at the end of each meeting for public comments about the day's proceedings.

Questions regarding these meetings or the rule revision process can be directed to Child Day Care Licensing staff at (517) 373-8300.

Ted DeWolf

the children and sent the message, "You are not capable of solving your own problems, so I will have to do it for you." Because adults were using the same solution (taking turns for 5 minutes) over and over again, we were not teaching children that problems can have many different acceptable solutions. The opportunity to work on problem-solving skills was being taken away from the children.

Four years ago, we adopted a model for conflict resolution which represented a continuum of adult intervention, beginning with minimal adult intervention (moving closer to the conflict without intervening), asking children questions, suggesting possible solutions, and then moving toward maximum adult intervention (restraint) if necessary. This helped us all get into the habit of making sure children needed adult intervention first, before we intervened. It also helped us to remember to ask questions and give children the opportunity to resolve the problem before we provided solutions. We have now adopted a conflict resolution model for young children that was developed by Marjorie Kostelnick and Laura Stein (out of Michigan State University), which buildings in steps for supporting and reinforcing the problem-solving process. Their steps include: Beginning mediation (neutralizing the object if necessary and defining the problem); clarifying each child's point of view (focusing on what each child wants); summarizing the problem in mutual terms; exploring possible solutions (provided by the children themselves, or offered by other children); helping children agree on a solution (finding the solutions that seem most acceptable to them); reinforcing their problem-solving efforts; and following through (helping children carry out the terms of their agreement and bringing children back together if necessary).

Classrooms and teachers have worked with this process, have made it their own and have discovered that, while it takes more time initially to guide children through the steps than it would have taken to solve the problem for the children, the number of conflicts requiring adult intervention has decreased dramatically. Children have the ownership over this process. They know that they have to take responsibility for solving their problems, that they have the right not to agree with a particular solution, and that adults or others may not impose solutions upon them. The beauty of this process is the opportunity for real-life learning. The children gain experience in problem-solving, become adept at generating a host of potential solutions, and most of all, think of themselves as problem-solvers. They have the opportunity to experience the consequences of their decisions, and apply this knowledge to future conflicts.

As a staff, we have shifted our thinking to accept the reality that conflict is a natural part of life and living, and to look at conflict in the classroom as a natural and necessary opportunity for learning, rather than as a nuisance to be dealt with as quickly as possible. Most of all, we believe that we send a strong message to children that we do indeed see them as capable learners, thinkers, and problem-solvers.

Kostelnick, Marjorie J. and Laura C. Stein. "Conflict Resolution: Helping Children Settle Their Disputes" *The Beacon*. Michigan Association for the Education of Young Children, November, 1989.

CHILD CARE IS FAMILY CARE

Gail McDonald
Mt. Pleasant Schools
Children Learning Center, Isabella County

It is a privilege to share a special few months with a child, and the role of caregiver is a vital one, but the caregiver must never lose sight of the fact that children will live a lifetime in their own family. Having a positive and productive relationship with families is the heart of being a professional caregiver and requires special skills and interests on our part. These include understanding, knowledge of child development, insight, empathy, loving affection, and good common sense. The role of a professional caregiver differs from a "babysitter". If the general public fails to value our work, its important to remember that we make a positive impact in the lives of children and their families and That Counts!

The delicate balance of working with the children and their family is a daily challenge. As caregivers we are given the opportunity to teach, to learn, to share life experiences with each family.

Creating a positive partnership with the family starts with positive communication. Good communication takes two forms: written and verbal. The written communication can be in the form of a daily log. The log records useful information for the family about the daily routine and the child's development. One of the most important sections of the log is the comment section in which the caregiver records the days events and has an opportunity to write a diary about each child.

This section is important to help ease the separation of child and family for the day. Families do not feel like they miss out on their child's day if they are informed of all happenings. The log is both a challenge and a frustration to the caregiver for the simple reason that it is sometimes difficult to write something fresh and new each day. However, the most comforting thing for Mom and Dad to read is that the day went well and even though that seems routine.

Verbal communication is vital. It gives a family an opportunity to build a foundation of trust with the caregiver. Every family is unique and has different expectations and requirements. One skill that the professional caregiver develops is to be able to "read" each family and interact with them on that basis. Each family should be greeted both in the morning and at night. It is a nice time to share together about their mutually favorite topic — the kids! Parents and caregivers often grow close to each other and share other things too.

Caregivers need to apply their knowledge of the different age groups in order to make appropriate comments about the child, deciding what is important and what is trivial. Negative comments can hardly reinforce the family, while positive comments can help the parents feel love and pride in their child. The caregiver should use "role-reversal" and think how it feels to be the child, and how it feels to be the parent.

Keep in mind all the things families have to cope with each day. They have to balance work pressures, finding time to be everywhere at once, financial stresses, and their feelings about leaving their child for the day. If the caregiver is aware of these things, it can help her become a better caregiver and thereby relieve some of the stress on the family. Communication is improved by asking open-ended questions, being flexible, and being willing to adapt to each day's unique problems.

The role of the caregiver is a supportive one NOT a competitive one. It isn't a contest to see who the child loves best. Caregivers must always remember they are in partnership with families to provide the best for each child. Caregivers are the support troops for the child and the family. Some ways to eliminate even the image of competition are to hold the baby out to the parent when she comes to pick up her child. It is also helpful to let the parent have a few moments to reunite with the child while the caregiver gets things ready to go home.

Some parents have commented that it is difficult to change "hats" from work roles to parent roles. The attitude of the caregiver is very important and helps determine whether the parent's reunion with the child is a positive one. Negative comments or looks don't help make the transition to the evening. Parents don't like to be greeted with the "thank goodness you are finally here" attitudes.

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HELPING YOUNG CHILDREN CHANNEL THEIR AGGRESSIVE ENERGIES

Sally Provence, M.D.

Published in Zero to Three, *April, 1985*

While this article was written for parents, the information is relevant for child care providers as well.

According to developmental theory, aggressive impulses or drives are born in the human child and are a crucial aspect of the psychological life-force and of survival. In the course of healthy development, these drives are normally expressed in various behaviors at different ages and, with assistance from parents and others, are gradually brought under the control of the individual — moderated, channeled and regulated but by no means stamped out. We expect that young children who are developing normally will display aggressive behavior — both physical and verbal — toward adults, other children, and objects in their environment. Brothers and sisters engage in combat. Young children in groups inevitably behave aggressively toward one another just as they behave in friendly ways and join in interesting activities. When they want the same toy or the same adult, competition and strife are bound to occur. If a child is irritable or angry, he or she may lash out at another without apparent provocation.

During the first year, infants are not often thought of as behaving aggressively, and yet encounters in which an infant pushes, pulls, or exerts force against another are signs of the outwardly directed energy and assertiveness that reflect the healthy maturation of aggression. But the nine-month old who pulls your hair does not know that it might hurt — it is done in the same exuberant, playful spirit that is seen in other activities. It is only in the second year, when the child develops a better awareness of his separateness as a person — of "me" and "you" — that he can begin to understand that he is angry at someone and behave with intentional force. We do not usually talk about a child's being cruel or hostile toward others until some time during the second year. Even then, he does not know enough about cause and effect to understand the consequences of his action or how to regulate this behavior toward others. When your fifteen-month-old smashes a fragile object, he is caught up in the pleasure of assertiveness, not anticipating its result.

Parents sometimes tell me about their toddler who "knows better" than to hit or bite. They believe this is so because when he is scolded, he looks ashamed. What the toddler understands is not that is has hurt someone or destroyed something but that he has earned the disapproval of his parents. Conversely, when praised for being gentle with another, he knows and is please that he is approved of for that behavior at that moment. It will take time and many reminders before he can understand that not hitting or biting applies to many situations. Young children, particularly those under three and a half or so, scarcely know their own strength. The differences between a kiss and a bite, between patting and hitting, between nudging and pushing someone down are not automatically understood and children need many reminders: e.g., "Let me show you how to pat the baby (or the family dog or Daddy's cheek)"; "Patting feels nice. Hitting can hurt"; or "Do it softly (or gently), like this."

As is true of the young child's development in other areas, there are steps and phases in the socialization of aggression, and it is worth your while to learn something about what kind of behavior to expect at various ages. If you understand what an infant or toddler or a four-year-old is capable of, you can adjust your own actions and teaching to realistic expectations and save yourself worry and frustration. You don't need the anxiety of imagining that your toddler who gets very angry and has very little control over his aggression when frustrated or upset is destined to become an angry, destructive, uncontrolled four- or ten- or twenty-year-old. On the other hand, if your four-year-old has frequent aggressive outbursts and seems not to be concerned about the effect of his aggression, or even seems to enjoy hurting others, you are correct in being worried and in seeking ways to help him toward healthier behavior.

How then do parents moderate and channel their child's aggression without stamping it out by being too severe?

While there is no exact recipe, here are twelve suggestions that may help you to provide your child with the guidance he needs.

1. **Keep in mind that your child's feeling loved and affectionately cared for builds the foundation for his acceptance of the guidance you will provide as his development proceeds.** This includes the regulation of aggressive behavior. Children who feel loved want to please their parents most of the time and will respond to their guidance. Putting reasonable restrictions on your child's behavior is part of loving him, just as are feeding, comforting, playing and responding to his wishes.

2. **Try to figure out what triggered your child's aggressive behavior.** Ask yourself what might have happened that set him off — your behavior or that of another person, or something else in the situation; perhaps he is overtired or not feeling well physically. Being rushed, abruptly handled, being denied something he wants, even being unable to do something he has tried to do with a toy or physical activity often produces feelings of frustration and anger that result in aggressive behavior: the toy gets thrown, or the child cries and strikes out or stormily says, "Mommy, I hate you." This can also occur at times when there is no readily apparent cause for the outburst.

3. **Make use of what you know about your child's temperament, rhythms, preferences, and sensitivities.** For example, if you know that he is irritable or ill-humored for the first hour of the day or gets very out of sorts when tired or hungry, you won't pick that time to ask a great deal in the way of control. If you know that he is likely to behave aggressively when another child comes close, you will want to be nearby to help him control that behavior. If he easily becomes "wound up" with excitement and is more aggressive at such times, you will want to help him tone down the excitement so that he can continue to play. If you know that he gets upset, angry, and aggressive when teased, you will want to give him some protection from teasing by others, especially by adults.

4. **Tell your child what you want him to do or not do in a specific situation but try not to give a long lecture.** Your child will be aware of your displeasure from your tone of voice as well as from what you say. It is important that you try to be clear about your disapproval. However, long lectures and dire predictions are usually counterproductive. Telling a three-year-old child that God won't love her if she hits her baby brother may frighten her, but it is unlikely to help her understand and develop her own controls. A better reason is that you don't want her to hit him because it hurts. That you don't like the behavior is your most effective message. It helps any young child who has earned the disapproval of a parent to be reminded that she is loved even when you don't like the behavior. And sometimes the young attacker needs as much comfort as the victim because the negative feelings that are aroused by one's own aggressive behavior.

5. **When your young child is playing with other children, keep an eye on the situation but try not to hover.** What begins as playful shuffling or run and chase or sharing toys can quickly move into a battle between children, and they may need a referee. However, there are times when you can let young children work things our among themselves. When you believe that none of the children is in danger of being hurt, you may decide to see how they can settle their differences because if successful, they should be better able to manage the next situation more adequately. Age makes a difference, of course. Such solutions are often within the abilities of three- to five-year-olds, while the under-threes will need your help and protection more frequently.

6. **When your child is being aggressive in ways you don't like, stop the behavior and give him something else to do.** You may either suggest and help start a new activity or perhaps guide him to a place where he can discharge aggressive feelings without doing harm to himself, to anyone else, to toys, or to the family pet. For example, a corner in which there is something to punch or bang or throw at can be utilized. You can say, for example, "If you feel like hitting, go and hit your pillow (or punching bag), but you can't hit the dog (or bang the table with a hammer)." Such an opportunity not only helps the child discharge some aggressive feelings but also helps him understand that there can be a time and place provided for such actions.

7. **When time permits, demonstrate how to handle a situation in which there is conflict between children.** For instance, if your child is old enough, you can teach him a few words to use in order to avoid or settle a conflict. A two-year-old can be helped to hold on to a toy and say "no" or "mine" instead of always pushing or crying when another child tries to take a toy. A four-year-old can be shown how to deflect a younger brother or sister who is about to move in on his treasures. Children need specific suggestions and demonstrations from adults in order to learn that there are effective ways to handle disagreements that are more acceptable than physical attack and retaliation.

8. **If your child has language skills, help him explain what he is angry about.** If you are able to guess and he cannot say, do it for him, e.g.. "I

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T.V. ... OR NOT T.V.

by Linda Herbert, Coordinator
Livingston County 4C Office

One Saturday morning, my six-year-old burst into my bedroom while I was cleaning. He kept screaming, "They're killing them, Mom ...they're killing them." Trying desperately not to panic, I worked fast to calm him to the point where I could understand who was being killed, and who I needed to call for help. It turned out that the "who" being killed, were baby seals he had viewed on a television documentary.

Many television programs contain acts of violence that children should not witness. Studies seem to agree that by the age of fourteen, the average child has been exposed to approximately twelve thousand acts of violence on television. How could this happen to a child? The answer is simple. National studies report the average child in America spends more time viewing television than any other activity except sleeping. It is estimated that children, ages, two to five, watch 25 hours of television per week; children six to eleven watch 22 hours per week; and adolescents watch 23 hours per week. Additionally, children see about 20,000 commercials a year.

The effect television and video viewing has on children is tremendous. Child care providers continue to report more children displaying behaviors that are violent, aggressive, and troubled. Children are coming to child care with a memory bank of violence, often from media viewing, and providers must deal with these issues.

Due to poor quality of some television and video programs, a number of adults feel that children should have all television viewing eliminated from their lives. There are also many poor quality books written, yet we would never suggest that children should not read. Like reading, television viewing, if guided appropriately, can be a positive learning tool for children. Through television, children can explore foreign lands and cultures; study science, the arts, history; and join travels to other planets. Television can expand a child's senses, and stretch a child's imagination and attention span.

Children are constantly learning, and every television and video program teaches something. Providers must then ask, "Is this program teaching, what a child should be learning?" If a child is allowed to view programs that contain physical and emotional violence, or foster a lack of humanity, the child's social and emotional growth can be damaged. The effect television has on children depends on whether we adults monitor the remote control.

Providers who choose to use television or videos should do so selectively. First pre-view the program to assure it is appropriate for children to view. Then make sure that it relates to their current program or theme. Television or video viewing should not be used merely as a transitional filler. Following is a list of activities that can be used as an alternative to television or video viewing:

- games that offer interaction
- reading with, or to the child
- art projects
- sharing different types of music
- learning to play a musical instrument
- physical exercise
- pet care
- developing hobbies
- cooking
- science experiments
- team sports
- story telling, theatrics or puppetry
- talking with each other

Television viewing for children should be limited. Allowing a child to spend too much sedentary time in front of a television may cause that child to become a passive spectator rather than an active participant in life. Expert opinion varies on what constitutes an appropriate amount of viewing time for children. Children are unique individuals with specific needs. What may be appropriate viewing time for one child may not be for another. Providers and parents together can develop a log of a child's total television viewing time, the content of programs viewed, and viewing habits for a period of one week. This week long study will aide the adults in determining if a child needs viewing time limited, program choices more closely monitored, or changes in viewing habits. Television should not control a child's life. When limiting a child's viewing time, or guiding a child in changes of viewing habits, adults must act as role models. If adults are sitting in front of television many hours per day, and are not socializing or emotionally interacting with other humans, a child will mirror that behavior.

Child care providers and parents trying to cope with every day stresses may find it easy to use television as a mechanical caregiver for children. I had left my son watching a television documentary which the television guide led me to believe, detailed only the lives of cute baby seals. What my son actually viewed were men hunting baby seals with clubs. He wanted me to rescue the seals immediately. The viewing of baby seals being violently destroyed had a drastic emotional effect on my son which moved him to take immediate action against this social issue. To assist him in taking personal control of this situation, we wrote to legislators in Lansing and Washington, D.C.; circulated "Save The Seals" petitions throughout his school, church and neighborhoods; and saved returnable bottles to donate money to the "Save The Seals" campaign. My son, now a nineteen-year-old college student, continues to advocate the saving of seals. I continue to advocate quality programming, supervision, and limitations of children's television viewing.

ON THE HOME FRONT

A good family day care home, by the nature of its homelike quality, fosters social and emotional development of children without store bought programs or canned curriculum. We asked licensing consultants to share with us some of the wonderful things they have seen you doing. Here's what they've seen:

Relating to Children

- Greeting children every day with a hug.
- Respecting children's feelings without brushing them off. Not assuming to know how they feel.
- Getting on the children's level and speaking face-to-face.
- Establishing realistic expectations.
- Noticing children being good.
- Giving honest praise.
- Accepting and reflecting feelings.
- Not demanding dishonest apologies.
- Disapproving of acts, not children.
- Encouraging children to work through their own problems.
- Addressing children in a positive manner, especially when disciplining them.
- Giving children information about proper and expected behavior, not making them guess.
- Planning activities that promote problem-solving through play.

Planning Your Day

- Turning off the T.V.
- Offering lots of opportunities for dramatic play, art projects and outdoor activities.
- Scheduling a quiet sharing time that includes greeting each child in the group.
- Giving a chance to be on the caregiver's lap while they share their "news".
- Designating helpers to make or serve snack or lunch, wash dishes, rake leaves, make bread or play dough or mix paints.
- Allowing children to play with favorite objects from home.

Connecting With Families

- Maintaining contact with parents. Let them know the good things that are happening to their child as well as reporting accidents or concerns.
- Having a monthly or quarterly family pot luck so children feel the connection between home and day care.
- Creating a day care album that includes pictures of the children's families.
- Displaying a photo of each child and family pictures on a bulletin board or on the wall in the play area.

The following licensing consultants contributed to this article: Emily Bettencourt, Greg Straley, Joan Workman, Patricia Hearron, Joyce Elsea, Jonalyn Rustem.

PRIMARY CAREGIVER

Carole Grates, Supervisor
Child Day Care Licensing
Genesee County

You have just been hired to be a primary caregiver in the infant room and aren't you lucky! One of the most important jobs in this profession is caring for the very youngest children. You have an important role in the healthy emotional development of the children since this is the critical time for building trust relationships with a few primary people. Now the question is how you can be the most effective in this primary relationship. It's as easy as one — two — three, as you will see.

ONE — Your role as the primary caregiver is to provide a one to one relationship with the children assigned to you. It is possible to do this for more than one child at a time — mothers of triplets do it quite well! But it takes a great deal of energy and commitment. A one to one relationship requires eye to eye contact and lots of touching and holding. Responding to babbles and coos and reading distress signals like crying helps to build this one to one relationship. Since so much infant caregiving involves activities like feeding and diapering, it is fortunate these are also the times that will give you the best opportunity for these one to one responses.

TWO — The two critical elements of primary caregiving, continuity of care and consistency, can happen if an infant has no more than two primary caregivers — not including the parents — in any given day. As much as possible, this consistency should remain in place whenever the child is in care. We know that children can form primary attachments with more than one person. But we also know that lack of consistency between these primary persons or breaking the continuity of care may have an adverse affect on healthy emotional development. Working out the scheduling as described above is one way to assure this consistency.

THREE — A three way communication should be in place between you and your caregiver/partner and between both of you and the parents. This can happen effectively with some simple procedures.

1. The parent should be able to communicate with at least one of you at the beginning or end of the day. Just a few words can ease the most worried parent.
2. There should be a good system of record keeping for both parents and you. Some providers ask parents to complete a form each morning that updates the staff on any changes in the child since returning home. Conversely, you need to keep a written record of what the child eats, when she sleeps, her diaper changes and of course any special happenings.
3. Primary caregiver schedules should overlap by at least 15 minutes so you can share information on each child with your caregiver/partner and help make a transition for the child if she is up and awake.

Probably the hardest part of being a primary caregiver is dealing with your attachment to each child. You need to keep reminding yourself you act as a stand-in for awhile but you can never substitute for the parent. In most cases — "Mother knows best" — is the best policy. When you think she might be a little off the track, help her to find resources without taking over.

Good luck in your new position! You really do have one of the most important jobs in the early childhood profession.

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guess you're mad because you can't go to play with Johnny. I know how you feel, but it's too late to go today" (or whatever the reason is). Among the things children begin to learn during the early years are some of the connections between feelings, thoughts, and behavior. This learning is accomplished gradually as the child hears what is said about himself and others, and he is helped to understand that feelings and ideas lead to actions, some of which are approved and some not.

9. **Ask yourself if you are sending "mixed messages" to your child about his aggressiveness.** If you say "Don't hit" or "Be nice" while you are not so secretly enjoying your child's aggressive behavior toward someone else, he will be confused, and such confusion tend to make it more difficult to develop self-control.

10. **Keep in mind that parents are the most important models for behavior and the creators of the family atmosphere and guidance that children need in order to use aggression in a healthy way.** If social exchanges in your family include much arguing or physical fighting in the presence or hearing of your children, you can count on their picking it up. You can expect that they will imitate that behavior in their interaction with others, becoming either excessively quarrelsome or physically aggressive or becoming excessively submissive out of fear.

11. **Think about the very real disadvantages of physical punishment for your child.** Children often arouse anger in adults when they provoke, tease, behave stubbornly, or attack others. If your practice is to hit or physically punish your child in some other way for such behavior, you need to think very carefully about what he learns from that. Even with the best of intentions, you may be sending the wrong message. Rather than learning how to control his aggression as you want him to do, he may interpret your behavior to mean that physical force always wins out, and he may not develop other ways of settling disputes. There is the danger that he will become even more aggressive or may fail to develop the ability to cope with the ordinary pressures of social contact.

12. **Your child's learning to love and live in reasonable harmony with others comes about only gradually and over many years.** For you as parents there will always be ups and downs, periods when you despair of "civilizing" your child or when you will worry that he will be too timid for the rigors of the world. While living from day to day with the pleasures and frustrations of being a parent, it is also important to keep the long view in mind: there is a positive momentum to development. This forward thrust of your child's growth and development actually works in favor of his acquiring the ability to channel and productively use those aggressive energies that are a vital part of our makeup.

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MAKE CLEAR YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CHILD AND HIS FAMILY

Do not let your self replace the child's parents. Support the relationship between him and his parents, and make very clear to them that your role is supportive.

For instance, begin a child's toilet training only when his parents think he is ready. And then agree with them on the method to be used so that each can support the efforts of the other. You may suggest another approach but abide by the parent's decision.

Show concern for each child's welfare by saying and doing that which is in the best interest of the child and of the whole group.

Take nothing out on the child. It isn't his fault if you are tired or his parents forgot his extra clothes.

Take time to talk about each child with his parents, but always discuss difficulties and differences of opinions when the child can't hear. Respect confidences shared, including the child's.

These are some things you should note regularly and discuss with the parents. Remember you are likely to be the one who witnesses a baby's first step — not the parent. Paint a verbal picture wherever possible of:

- How the child's eating and sleeping habits are changing.
- How he feels about new things.
- What he likes the most.
- What his current interests are.
- How creative he is.
- How he relates to the others and you.
- How much your husband enjoys him.

Discourage discussing anything not relevant to the child. You cannot become involved in family squabbles but if parents ask for assistance, you can suggest where they can get help.

Sometimes parents want to do special things for you because they appreciate you. Encourage them to show how they feel by doing things for the children in your care rather than for you personally.

Remember that your are running a business. Therefore be firm about such things as a child's being picked up promptly. Also be consistent — apply your policies the same way for everyone.

You are caring for your own family as well as for other people's children. Make sure the day care children and their parents understand that you have your own family to care for.

Reprinted from *When You Care for Children*. DSS Pub 102.

Child Care is Family Care

(Continued from page 3)

Caregivers can support parents in 6 essential ways:

Assurance – you will protect and give quality care to my child.

Opinions – respect my knowledge about my child and don't judge my parenting skills.

Affection – You will love and nurture my child and not compete with me for his affection.

Listening – Talk with me about my feelings and accept them. Never betray my confidence.

Empathy – Feel how I feel. Feel how my child feels. It's not easy leaving my child.

Confidence in family – Give our family room to grow and trust that we will do so.

The nicest confirmation of the role of the caregiver came from a family that wrote to say "things you all do like greeting parents on arrival and commenting on the details of the child's day — these 'small' things are so valuable! You made me feel part of my child's day even though I couldn't be there. I have thought about the program and understood more than ever how much you gave me, and taught my children and me. Thank you." Those words make it all worthwhile. Our role can be summarized in these words "the way we touch them now will touch them forever".

RESOURCES – SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL NEEDS

Are We Listening to Children About Their Feelings? Listening to Harry (and solving a problem in my kindergarten classroom) Betty An Rich.

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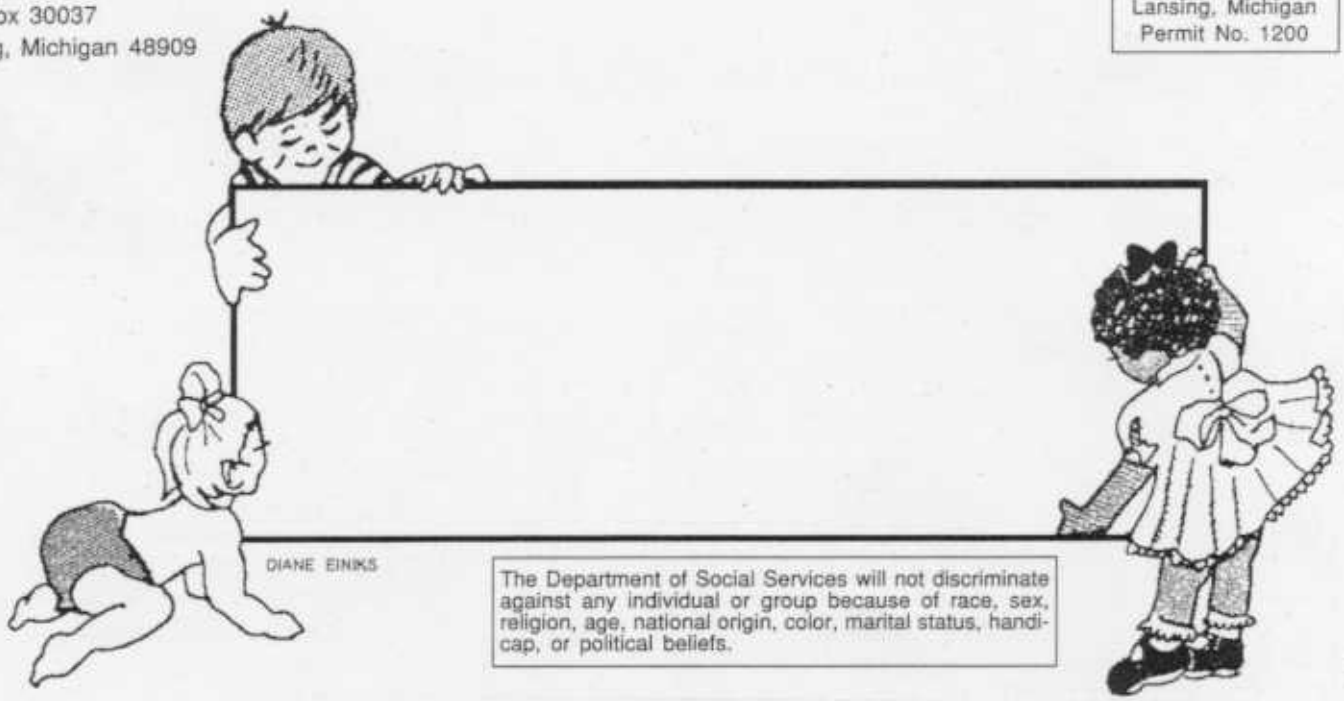

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